

Communist University



2013

Agitprop

Part 8

Strikes, Work-to-rules, Sit-downs and Occupations



Chicago Schools Strike 2012



Chicago Schools Strike 2012

How to Strike

Canadian Strike Manual; Management Strike Manual

In our whole series of courses, of which this is the fifteenth out of sixteen, we have not yet had any education on how to strike. Strike is the main weapon of the working class in its struggle with capital. The communists are the partisans of the working class.

The knowledge of how to conduct strikes is embedded in the trade union movement and in the minds and memories of millions of South Africans who have been through the experience of striking.

To some extent the knowledge also exists in training institutions like Ditsela, and in the academy. But the literature is scant. On the Internet we have so far found rather little. The following is from the work of William Z Foster called "[Strike Strategy](#)". Foster was a leader of the US Communist Party who ran an organisation called the [Trade Union Educational League](#) (T. U. E. L.).

“STRIKE ORGANIZATION

“It is not within the province of this booklet to outline a complete system of the special organization machinery necessary for the carrying on of strikes successfully. Nevertheless it is timely to state a few of the general principles of organization and to indicate some of the more urgent necessities.

“The strike committee, whether the regular executive board or a special body, is the general staff of the strike and it must be properly organized to carry on its work. It must be divided into sub-sections to correspond with its various tasks. If the strike is national in scope the strike committee must contain various departments, Finance, Relief, Legal, Publicity, etc. The local strike committees must have sub-committees on Policy, Picketing, Publicity, Defense, Halls, Speakers, Finance, etc.

“In the case of unorganized workers every effort must be made to establish a real basis of trade union organization. Too often the only organization of the masses in such strikes is in the strike meetings. This is a mistake. The masses must be brought into active strike work. It gives them a sense of responsibility and a feeling that the strike is really their own. To thus draw them in, the numerous committees should be built on a broad scale, T. U. E. L. formations of various sorts may also be used to actively enlist the liveliest elements in the conduct of the strike.

“The picket committee, in most industries, is the very heart of the strike. It is the cutting edge of the workers’ organization. It is the first line of defense and attack. It must be developed to the highest degree of militancy and efficiency. It should be made up of the very best fighters among the workers...

“The legal committee is also essential, but the left wing must always be careful to hold the lawyers in check. They have a rather fatal habit, once they are engaged, of trying to run the whole strike as well as their legal department. If they succeed in this they soon strip it of all militancy and reduce it to a state of impotent legalism. They are also notoriously poor fighters at the conference table.

“The publicity committee is very vital. To give out the news of the strike is fundamentally important, not only for the information of the workers at large, whose support is wanted, but also for the strikers themselves, whose solidarity must be maintained. Yet in almost every strike, whether conducted by rights or lefts, the publicity arrangements are primitive and inadequate in the extreme.”

Foster was himself a successful strike leader. His book is a must-read.

There are works by [Lenin](#) and [Luxemburg](#) on strikes, but they are rather more concerned with the theoretical aspect of strikes as part of revolutionary strategy and tactics.

What we have found on the Internet, is the Canadian “PIPSC” Strike Manual (attached). This is a real strike manual of a real union. It is a large union, and the scale of the strike organisation described is large, but it is still very instructive. Here is the basic definition of a strike given in this manual:

“A strike is the refusal of employees to perform some of or all of their work. Strike action may take many forms, depending on the characteristics and nature of the work performed by the striking group. Regardless of the course of action taken, the objective remains the same: to persuade the employer to adopt a position acceptable to the union and its members on the issues in dispute. The union must be in a legal strike position before undertaking any strike activities. Strike plans should be prepared prior to a legal strike period. They must be treated as highly confidential to succeed.”

Employer’s Strike Manual

Finally, we have an employer’s strike manual (attached). It is very instructive indeed. It is particularly expressive of the aggressive frame of mind of the employer, and of the employer’s managers, who are themselves employees.

Reading all of these documents should make people aware of what a strike feels like. Quite likely it will make you respect the working people who go through this tough experience.



Struben Street, Pretoria, 24 April 2013

Go-slows, Work-to-rules

A Go-slow is one thing. A Work-to-Rule is something else.

SADTU conducted a successful and victorious work-to-rule in 2013. Teachers are expected to do many things for which they do not get paid. SADTU members stopped doing those things. The above picture shows the massive march of SADTU members in Pretoria (there was another one in Cape Town on the same day) that was an extension of the work-to-rule campaign.

A go-slow is different. A go-slow is a strike, while in South Africa, a Work-to-Rule is not a strike.



Woolworths Sit-In, Greensboro North Carolina, 13 Feb 1960
Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Dave Richmond, and Ezzell Blair Jr.

Sit-downs, Sit-ins and Occupations

In a [sit-down strike](#), the workers physically occupy the plant, keeping management and others out.

The most famous sit-down strike was the [Flint, Michigan](#), car-workers' strike, which lasted from 30 December 1936 for 40 days and which put the United Auto Workers' Union on the map. Not long afterwards, the US government passed a law taking protection away from sit-down strikes, meaning that the bosses could fire people for taking part in one.

Two decades later, in the anti-racist Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s the [sit-in](#) became a tactic for desegregating facilities such as “lunch counters” in the USA. The above picture shows one that took place in 1960.

These tactics are in turn related to the idea of “Occupation” whereby the people take over some place and thereby deny it to the owners, or claimed owners.

Land invasions are a kind of occupation. Sometimes they are successful, but not always.

Another kind of occupation has been the “Occupy” movement, which did not manage to hold on to anything that it occupied.

Conclusion is that this tactic, in one form or another, may be successful but is not always going to be.

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